

BRUCE

On the Political Front
By Henry A. Waxman
Congressman, 24th District

January 17, 1975

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE STILL TOP PRIORITY

As I begin my work in Congress I have uppermost in mind the goal of enacting a comprehensive national program to assure quality medical care for all. I do not believe that this goal should be placed on the proverbial "back burner" because of the other pressing problems facing us. In recent months Congressional, Presidential and public interest has been focused on the issues of economic and energy policy. In the area of economic policy I feel strongly that national health insurance would help rather than aggravate the situation.

One argument for postponing national health insurance will be that additional federal expenditures in the health area would be inflationary. I disagree. If we pare the federal budget where the waste and fat really are -- especially in the military sector -- we can increase health spending without exacerbating inflationary trends. Even more important, as a national health insurance program would be financed primarily by payroll deductions it will, to a large extent, "pay its own way."

From an economic standpoint the most attractive feature of national health insurance is that it will create jobs at every skill level. It will create jobs for some of the groups in our society who have been hardest hit by unemployment. National health insurance will not create artificial "make-work" to combat the recession. It will give people meaningful and important work helping the sick and disabled.

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It is well known that federal expenditures on exploration of outer space generate employment across a very narrow range of occupations. True, many people in this relatively small range of occupations are employed. However, these employees tend to be engineers, technicians, and skilled workers who have the resources to tide them through a recessionary period.

I am usually very leary of comparing the expenditures of the federal government to a family budget. The analogy, especially when applied to deficit spending, can be most misleading. However, the comparison can be enlightening when applied to the question of priorities. Certainly the last area where my family would scrimp and cut would be medical care. I believe that we, as a nation, should place the physical well-being of all citizens at the very pinnacle of our value system. Neither a balanced budget, foreign aid, nor military might can justify needless suffering and premature death.

The state of the economy is an additional reason to move ahead full speed towards national health insurance. Those who use it as an argument for delaying this much needed legislation are either ignorant of the economic consequences that will result from national health insurance or are simply cynically exploiting the recession to oppose fundamental changes in our system of medical care.

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